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DIALOGUE JANUARY 20, 2010

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Pekala for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (S/NF) Summary. Under Secretaries Burns and Flournoy: The timing of your January 20 dialogue with France could not be better. You will find your French interlocutors ready to work with us on the strategic questions of mutual interest including Af/Pak, the NATO Strategic Concept, Missile Defense, Turkey, Russia, Iran, MEPP, Yemen and Lebanon. The French are eager to coordinate on strategy on Af/Pak in advance of the January 28 London Conference. Recognizing that final decisions rest with President Sarkozy, we should press for additional publicly acknowledged security and civilian commitments to our common effort in Afghanistan. On the Middle East, Paris continues to push for a summit. NSA Levitte told Presidential Envoy Mitchell that they now want to organize a high-level meeting in late March, to support Palestinian state institutions. On Russia, the French are eager to coordinate with us on joint messages on strategic issues while maintaining their policy of engagement to positively influence Russian behavior. Your French interlocutors will likely push for an OSCE summit to give impetus to the discussions on European security and they are eager to re-launch negotiations on the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty to break the two-year impasse of Russian suspension. Iran's nuclear ambitions are considered by French leaders to be one of the most critical issues we face this year. French officials want to develop targeted sanctions that will affect the regime without hurting the general population. Franco-Turkish relations have calmed down in the past few months, but frustrations on the difficulty of EU-NATO coordination and French opposition to Turkey's EU candidacy continue to fester. Paris officials are also anxious to work with us on next steps with Yemen, which has leapt to the forefront of security concerns in the past month. In addition to working our common approaches to global problems, this meeting reinforces the Administration's commitment to a developing foreign policy in coordination with partners, which will enhance our ability to mobilize French resources. End summary.

AFGHANISTAN/PAKISTAN: NEXT STEPS

¶12. (C/NF) The January 28 conference in London is a key date for French decision-makers weighing increased military or civilian commitments to Afghanistan. Both Sarkozy and Kouchner plan to attend. French military leaders acknowledge that they have available military capacity, but the decision on reinforcements is a political one that will be made by President Sarkozy himself. Paris hopes that the London conference and the follow-on ministerial meeting

in Kabul later this year will lay out some specific objectives that the Afghan government can attain over the next two years. In France, this will help government leaders demonstrate to their skeptical public that the French commitment of troops is worthwhile and that the international community is having a positive impact. (NOTE: In the most recent poll, more than 80% of French citizens were against the French deployment to Afghanistan.) This two-year time frame coincides with President Obama's reinforced troop surge and will take France to the spring 2012 Presidential elections. To date, French leaders have focused their military and civilian efforts on Kapisa province and Surobi district where the bulk of French troops are deployed, in an effort to best target their limited assistance and troop resources. Thus far, they have not/not been willing to contribute to the ANA or LOFTA trust funds where they have less control over the money and results. France strongly supports the creation of an ISAF Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) to help coordinate civilian activities in cooperation with UNAMA, but Paris does not want the position to affect national funding priorities (for example, they agree with the SCR's office coordinating NATO/ISAF related activities, such as reintegration and reconciliation, but are hesitant to accept SCR involvement in clinics and schools).

NATO STRATEGIC CONCEPT

¶3. (C/NF) French officials are very interested in the process to update NATO's Strategic Concept and have

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requested information on U.S. positions as soon as possible. Paris supports the idea of a strategic concept document that is simple, clear and concise, as NATO SYG Rasmussen had proposed, although French officials think it may be difficult to keep to this ideal in the face of competing priorities from NATO members. One of the big issues for France is NATO reform efforts -- they want to see NATO streamline its bureaucracy and operations and eliminate unnecessary duplication. Like Germany, France has a pragmatic approach to Russia and they are wary of inflaming tensions with Moscow, so they are watching proposals from Central European countries very carefully. A former French government official and think tank leader, Bruno Racine, is part of the Group of Experts headed by Madeleine Albright to lead the Strategic Concept review.

MISSILE DEFENSE: SUPPORTIVE BUT WAITING FOR DETAILS

¶4. (C/NF) Thus far, France has taken pains to be supportive of U.S. missile defense efforts in Europe, including agreeing to positive language for the declaration at the 2009 NATO summit in Strasbourg and in the communique issued at the December NATO ministerial meeting. However, French officials are impatient to learn further details about the "Phased Adaptive Approach" (PAA), how it will interact with NATO's Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (ALTBMD), what modifications and costs may be required, and most importantly, who will pay for it. France does not want MD to be paid out of NATO common funding. Even more fundamental to French interests is the potential impact of missile defense on France's nuclear deterrent capability. France balked at calling missile defense a "mission of NATO" in the December ministerial communique, which to French ears called into question the core purpose of NATO and had potential implications on French deterrence policy. French officials concede that MD could complement their deterrent, but emphasize that it can never become a substitute for this core element of French defense.

TURKEY: CALMER RELATIONS

¶5. (C/NF) The first half of 2009 was a difficult one for Franco-Turkish relations, with President Sarkozy's strong stance against Turkish EU accession in the European parliamentary campaign leading to chilly relations and a slowdown in high-level visits between the two countries. However, the situation seems to have calmed with visits by PM Gul and FM Davutoglu this past autumn. While both countries seem to have recognized that they had nothing to gain by further exacerbating tensions, sources of friction do remain. France is anxious for the EU and NATO to have better working relations, and Paris holds Ankara primarily responsible for insistence on Berlin Plus mechanisms and the inability to have formal coordination meetings between the two bodies. While some French officials privately acknowledge the role that Greece and Cyprus play in preventing better cooperation, they insist that they cannot tell a fellow EU member how to behave and it is up to Turkey, as the candidate country, to work out its relations with all the EU members. Their sole and invariable solution is to call on the U.S. to influence its Turkish ally to be more accommodating. Your interlocutors may also couch their worries about Turkey's role in Europe in expressions of concern about the Turkish government's perceived Islamic bent - a source of deep French consternation during the debate over the appointment of NATO SYG Rasmussen - and, potentially, its ambivalent position vis-a-vis the Iranian nuclear program.

IRAN: A NUANCED APPROACH

¶6. (S/NF) Senior French officials remain concerned that we are losing traction on this issue within the international community, as countries continue to engage in normal diplomatic and commercial relations with Iran and continued Iranian domestic political turmoil constrains our freedom of maneuver. President Sarkozy is unwavering in his staunch belief in non-proliferation (to maintain France's own deterrent capability), his very real concern about the threat to Israel, and his personal ire at Iran's machinations related to the continued

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detentions of French citizens including academic Clotilde Reiss. As you discuss next steps on Iran, the French will be ready to exchange ideas on how to continue the pressure on the regime's agents of proliferation while bolstering the opposition green movement forces in ways that do not paint the opposition with a pro-West brush. Recognizing that the UN Security Council is unlikely to agree on tough new sanctions in the short term, French officials are working on lists of possible sanctions that would be targeted towards the regime and avoid some of the broader economic sanctions that can hurt the general population by crippling the Iranian economy. They are prepared to implement such sanctions on a national basis in cooperation with other like-minded countries.

PUSHING ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIA

¶7. (C/NF) President Sarkozy is convinced that engagement with Moscow is the best way to influence Russian behavior and therefore seeks to create stronger Russian linkages to western institutions. Your dialogue responds to France's consistent emphasis on developing a common approach with the U.S. towards Russia that builds on the Washington-Moscow "reset" and will likely reflect French priorities including: promoting economic cooperation;

encouraging Russia to work through institutions with set rules; supporting Russian actions in public while taking a more honest approach in private meetings; and cultivating relations with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, in the hope that he can become a leader independent of Vladimir Putin. Expect France to argue that the proposed sale of Mistral-class ships to Russia offers another opportunity to anchor Russia to Western institutions -- just as French support for an OSCE summit to discuss European security is designed to entangle Russia in a web of commitments that address the human rights and other elements of the OSCE mandate. Your interlocutors may well push for an early re-launch of CFE negotiations, once the START talks have been completed. France will have multiple opportunities in coming months to engage with senior Russian leaders including Sarkozy's planned February visit to Moscow and the Medvedev visit to France in March 2010. Your dialogue offers an opportunity to coordinate messages in advance of these senior-level meetings.

MIDDLE EAST: PEACE PROCESS ENGAGEMENT

¶8. (S/NF) The French are eager to play a role in resolving a conflict that they see as the key to addressing many issues in the region. President Sarkozy continues to push, at the highest level, for a summit in 2010 to bring the parties together. While Paris originally proposed using the Union for the Mediterranean as the venue, Levitte proposed to SE Mitchell, on January 11, that France host a high level meeting in late March designed to support Palestinian institution building, as a follow-on to the 2007 Paris pledging conference. He proposed that if U.S. efforts on the political track succeed, the Paris meeting could also reinforce the re-launch of talks. You are likely to hear a strong pitch for our agreement on the concept and a date, although we have continued to maintain that the conditions are not yet ripe for such a meeting.

YEMEN - CREATE CONDITIONS FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE

¶9. (C) While surprised by the British-convened conference on Yemen in London on January 28, the French believe we can make progress on securing our mutual objectives as long as our efforts (1) are coordinated; (2) have a clear objective; and (3) carefully avoid "stigmatizing" Yemen as a failed state. France primarily supports the launching of national dialogue as a response to the civil war against the Houthis in the north of Yemen, while recognizing that opposition by Yemen and Saudi Arabia to outside intervention creates problems for effective external mediation. They believe, our efforts should be targeting at national reconciliation noting "we must help create the conditions for an effective national dialogue."

FINAL THOUGHTS

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¶10. (C) Your commitment to institutionalizing this engagement with France on core policy issues will pay dividends in increased collaboration and support for U.S. initiatives across a broad front. I look forward to hearing your assessment of the way forward following your discussions and how Mission France can support these initiatives.

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